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An Easter Story of Redemption

Dear Friends,

It would seem a little odd that I would begin a reflection on our journey through Lent into the glory of the Easter promise in Christ with the statement: "for the first time in over forty years I did not spend Easter morning in church". You might wonder about my faith or lack thereof. But there is, of course, a story. It begins with a family gathering on Easter weekend in Massachusetts to celebrate the life of one of my wife, Carol's, aunts who had died recently, and to at the same time lift up the story of a remarkable family. It is the story of a Jewish family, the seven Rubin brothers and their sister, set in a Nazi occupied Vienna in the late 1930's and early 1940's. Not one of the brothers or their sister, their spouses or their children, died in the Holocaust. Around them millions disappeared into the shadows of a sinister machine of systematic genocide. On Easter morning I was with the children, grandchildren and great grandchildren of these eight siblings and listened to their stories.

On Easter we arrive at the empty tomb having sojourned in the shadows of Lent. We have traversed a season of reflection, penitence; some of us may have undertaken spiritual disciplines of fasting or prayer for the season, a season of preparation. Then we come to the dawn of Easter morning, at first standing with the women at the tomb, confused and uncertain, why is the stone rolled away? Where have they taken him? But as the truth of the resurrection comes into focus, we sing, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death where is your victory? Death where is your sting? Thanks are to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" The story of our faith is a story of redemption over despair, or as Bishop Desmond Tutu wrote: "We proclaim

that the power of life is stronger than the grip of death, that the rising of faith can eclipse the shadow of disbelief, that love will conquer hate, and justice break the hold of evil and that grace will always triumph over judgment, and hope over despair".

The descendants of the Rubin family gathered on Easter morning was a story of redemption. I listened to stories of children who left their parents for far off places, not knowing if they would ever see them again. Some were boarded onto a "Kinder Train", taking them to England from where they would be sent to the United States. One woman told me that she, at age eleven was taken to the train by her father, and told "if you need to urinate, do so standing in place, and do not look down. If you ask for a bathroom they will take you away." She added, "The guard came through the line, and took every fourth or fifth child away, and then we heard gun shots. She described how, once on the train, a Nazi guard challenged a boy asking him what was in the case he was carrying. He said, "My violin". The guard said, "Take it out and play it for me. If you cannot play it, I will shoot you right here." He played it beautifully. Others came to the United States at the age of 16 or 17, and were taken in by families they did not

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the United States at the age of 16 or 17, and were taken in by families they did not know.

The parents escaped by a number of routes, one of the safest but most arduous was across the Soviet Union on the Trans-Siberian Railroad, then a ship to Japan, and then to the United States. One of the brothers in New York, Uncle Joe, was the one who resolved that every member of the family would live, and worked to see that this would happen. And so they did...everyone.

While I was not in church on Easter morning, I was surrounded by an Easter story, and there were perhaps 35 people to give testimony with their lives that it was an Easter story, a story of redemption and hope. And as with all Easter stories, we know that this story is just the beginning. Many others had died where they had lived. The living of the continuing Easter story is now passed to each of us, and we proclaim that the "power of life is stronger than the grip of death, and love will conquer hate, o death where is your victory?"

Peace,

Tim Downs
Conference Minister

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"Theological Education at Its Finest"

By Rev. Sarah Kim



seven participants from the Southeast Conference, UCC, spent the weekend engaging in critical theological reflection, creative worship experience, and a time of joyous fellowship.

On April 8-10, 2011, the Thailand 2011 trip participants reunited at the scenic setting of Calvin Center, a retreat center located in Hampton, GA. Along with their three facilitators—Dr. Greg Carey, Rev. Kathy Clark, and Rev. Dr. Sarah Kim—the seven seminarian participants from Lancaster Theological Seminary (Lancaster, PA) and the

This has been the first gathering of the group since the three-week trip to Thailand took place in January. The purpose of the post-trip retreat is to provide an opportunity for the participants to process their intensive learning experience as a group and to envision a normative praxis—for one's self, the church, and their communities.

Processing the learning experience is an integral part of the global theological education. The intensity of the Thailand immersion is apparent in many aspects of the

trip, including its global, cross-cultural context, the uncommon study subjects of interfaith dialogue, conflict resolution and peace-building, and the complexities

JOIN US on 2012
THAILAND TRIP



June 3
Application Deadline



associated with living and learning in a group of this size within the given time frame.

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No one, and I say this with a bit of confidence, comes out of such experience without being changed in some way.

The changes the learners experience have both collective and individual dimensions. The predominant sentiment among the participants was a sense of gratitude in being able to participate in such a special learning opportunity. The group candidly discussed the challenges of being exposed to a part of the world where issues of displaced Burmese refugees, HIV/AIDS, regional violence, and religious diversity pose societal problems that engender division, injustice, and suffering.



Apparently, we had to look really hard to find any kind of hope in all this, which brought us back to our faith—God—and the question of our call in the world as ministers, as Christians, and as fellow human beings. In the end, each of us came out appreciating what we have—our religion, culture, community, faith, and the peace that we can claim on a daily basis. In the end, the urgency of the named issues stimulated our creative minds and souls towards action; some of us wrote poems, wrote essays, sang songs, created photo collages, made a documentary video, designed worship, shared our learning within our communities, and we all prayed, prayed and hoped. In my view, this is



theological education at its finest. [Link here for 2012 Thailand Trip Application.](#)
Join us in 2012!

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**Lancaster Theological Seminary and Southeast Conference, United Church of Christ, TAP (Theology Among the People) Program presents:
Joint Global Theological Education Immersion Trip to Thailand
January 3 ~ 21, 2012
Sponsored by the Henry Luce Foundation**

APPLICATION

Due June 3, 2011

Name (exactly as it appears on passport): _____

Name you prefer to be called (if different): _____

Valid Passport #: _____ Expiration date: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: Home) _____ Date of Birth: _____

Work) _____ Gender: M _____ F _____

Cell) _____ Race: _____

Email: _____

Church: _____

Position (e.g. church member, pastor, seminary student): _____

Current TAP participant? Yes _____ No _____ TAP graduate? Yes _____ No _____

Occupation: _____

Education: _____

Do you have access to email and high speed internet connectivity? Yes _____ No _____

Do you have experience with on-line (e.g. webinars) learning platforms? Yes _____ No _____

What previous overseas experience do you have? (Please describe.)

Do you have health insurance that covers your healthcare needs in another country? Y__ N__

If yes, which insurance company? _____

Do you have any food allergies or health issues we should know about?

Are you able to attend the pre-trip retreat in Lancaster, PA (9/23~25/11)? Yes _____ No _____

Are you able to attend the post-trip retreat in Atlanta, GA (3/9~11/12)? Yes _____ No _____

Name: _____

PLEASE NOTE: Cost of the entire program is \$4000. It includes airfare from Atlanta to Thailand, internal travel, and room & board for 2 1/2 weeks plus the costs associated with pre- and post-trip retreats. Trip participants will receive a \$3000 scholarship and are expected to contribute \$1000 towards the total cost.* In addition, participants must cover any incidental costs (e.g. traveler's insurance, transportation to the Atlanta airport, occasional meals on one's own, and personal expenses). Priority will be given to current TAP participants and graduates. Applicants will be selected based on their application essays. Early application is encouraged.

Applicants must submit a deposit of \$250 of their \$1000 contribution with their application.**

Applications without deposits will not be considered. Checks will be held until participants are selected. The deposit will be refunded only if the applicant is NOT selected to go on the trip.

Please make checks payable to Southeast Conference UCC and put "TAP/GTE" in the memo line.

*Participants are encouraged to approach their local congregations and others to help raise the funds, if needed.

Write your personal statement, integrating the answers to the following questions.

Please write the essay in complete sentences.

Please type, on a separate sheet of paper as needed.

Desired length is approximately 500 words.

1. Tell us about who you are.
2. Why do you want to be a part of this trip?
3. Reflecting on the goals of this program as stated in the cover letter, what do you hope to learn?
4. What particular interest topics do you have about the trip?
5. What views do you have about other religions—e.g. Buddhism, Islam—in relation to Christianity?
6. What views do you have about peace-building efforts?
7. What are your expectations in traveling and learning with seminary students?
8. How would you share your learning experience in your community (e.g. church, association, work setting) upon your return?

Send Application & Deposit to:**
 Southeast Conference United Church of Christ
 1330 W. Peachtree St. NW, Suite 350
 Atlanta, GA 30309
 ATTN: TAP GTE Program in Thailand 2011

**Deposit amount is \$250. Please make checks payable to "Southeast Conference UCC."

For any questions, contact Rev. Sarah Kim at skim@secucc.org.

ALL ACCEPTANCE LETTERS WILL BE SENT OUT VIA EMAIL.
 PLEASE MAKE SURE YOU HAVE A CORRECT EMAIL ADDRESS ON THIS APPLICATION.

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Praxis and Open Table Funded



Praxis UCC Atlanta and Open Table Community of Faith UCC, Mobile Selected for Funding from UCC



Many of you are aware of the pioneering work of our staff in collaboration with new church developers across the South to build vital new United Church of Christ congregations. We are excited to report that two of our new churches have been selected to receive a substantial grant in the amount of \$15,000 each. Praxis UCC in Atlanta, currently worshipping at St. John's Lutheran Church on Ponce de Leon Avenue is a recipient. Chris and

Leah Lyman-Waldron are serving this congregation, and have initiated a dynamic worship service, a robust mission life, and have actively used social networking to reach an underserved population. Open Table Community of Faith has been a unique progressive and inclusive voice in Mobile. They are looking forward to having a UCC student intern this summer, and are eagerly anticipating participating in the upcoming annual meeting of the Conference, and General Synod. These grants are in themselves a testament to the great gifts of ministry that are in each of these congregations. *(Pictured: Left is Ellen Sims blessing the animals at Open Table Community of Faith. Right are Chris and Leah at Praxis first service.)*



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News From Our Local Churches - April



Glenna Shepherd, pastor Decatur United Church of Christ, was a guest speaker at the Immigration Rally in Atlanta, GA. "I acknowledge as we gather prayerfully this morning that immigration is a complex issue. It's filled with exception and nuance. But the complexity does not excuse us from taking a stand against blatant injustice!" (*Paraphrase of speech by Rev Al Sharpton who addressed the issue in Arizona.*)

Debbie Spearman has posted the latest updates for the **Transforming Churches - Transforming Lives Campaign** from our local churches. *Thank You!*



Leadership Spotlight



Rev. Paul Gourdine
Community Congregational UCC / Montgomery, AL

Rev. Gourdine inspires people, young and old, from all walks of life as he uses his God-given abilities to teach, motivate, and spiritually uplift. [Read more about Rev Gourdine's ability](#) to transcend cultural differences and bring people together on common ground.

We asked the question -

"How Will Your Church Celebrate Holy Week?"

You responded with the following:

> **Sandy Creek UCC | LaFayette, AL**

Pastor Wayde Washburn -

Palm Sunday began with a processional into worship, but minus the palms. Using the scripture from Matthew 21, the processional was adorned with branches from various trees and clothing strewn along the path. The One Great Hour of Sharing Offering was received during the service. On Thursday night, worship began with events from the Last Supper, including a Foot Washing. The service concluded with an impassioned walk along the Stations of the Cross. Then, on Sunday morning, at 5:45, worshippers gathered outside around an open fire, greeted the morning sun, and watched as they burned their "sins" that they had nailed upon the cross during the Lenten Season, worshipped in Word and Sacrament, and

then joined in a wonderful breakfast together!

> **First Congregational UCC | Talladega, AL**

Pastor Reginald Holloway - On Friday a Good Friday Worship Service was held from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m. The following ministers preached the last seven words of our Lord from the cross: Rev. Hardy Reynolds, of Talladega; Rev. Bud Precise of Birmingham, Rev. Sally Harris of Birmingham, Deacon Harvey Calhoun of 1st UCC, Talladega, and Pastor Reginald Holloway, 1st UCC, Talladega. On Easter Sunday, we had Sunday school at 9:00 a.m. taught by Sister Esther Holloway; at 10:00 we had Easter Brunch and at 11:00 we had our Easter Worship Service.

> **First Congregational UCC | Montgomery, AL**

Pastor Michael Garret - Clergy gathered on Good Friday to reflect on the seven last words of Christ:

Father forgive them - Rev. Gary Meyers, Trinity Congregational UCC, Athens, AL

Today thou shall be with me in paradise - Rev. Paul Gourdine, Community Congregational UCC, Montgomery, AL

Woman behold thy son -

Rev. Dr. Kendall Thomas

Why hast thou forsaken me - Rev. Robert S. Graetz, Jr.

I thirst - Rev. Lorenza Moore

It is finished - Rev. Dorinda Broadnax, Community Congregational UCC, Montgomery, AL

Into thy hands, I commend my spirit - Rev. Dr. Rodney Franklin, First Congregational Church UCC, Birmingham, AL

> **Open Community Church UCC | Atlanta, GA**

Pastor Soo Man Chang - Easter Sunday worship; A lot of smiles and eggs!

Pictures speak

a thousand words. *(Pictured right:*

Easter worship and then photo of prosperous egg hunt).

> **Virginia-Highland Church | Atlanta, GA**

Pastor Michael Piazza - This year the church partnered with Decatur United Church of Christ, Decatur, GA (Glenna Shepherd) one of the newest churches in the Southeast Conference of the UCC; Kirkwood UCC, Atlanta, GA (Susannah Davis); and Praxis UCC, Atlanta, GA, (Chris Waldron) a new church start, to offer joint Holy Week observances. Virginia-Highland Church, hosted the Maundy Thursday service, where they told the Passover story and ended with a traditional stripping of the altar. Hand washing and communion were featured. On Good Friday, April 22, the Virginia-Highland Church sanctuary was opened from noon until 3 p.m. for prayer. A joint Good Friday Tenebrae service was offered at Decatur UCC, and featured music by a combined choir from Virginia-Highland Church and Decatur UCC.

Virginia-Highland Church held its Easter Sunday service



virginia-highland Church held its Easter Sunday service.

> **Garden of Grace UCC | Columbia, SC**

Pastor Andy Sidden - This year Holy Week was celebrated with a Last Supper drama, focusing on the disciples on Palm Sunday, and a multi-media drama on Good Friday. Easter Sunday brought us special music by the Celebration Choir and was followed by an Easter egg hunt on our lawn for the children.

> **Pilgrimage UCC | Marietta, GA**

Pastor Kim Buchanan - The church shared together in a re-enactment of the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday. After that, they listened again to the Passion narrative. Good Friday, 5:00-8:00 p.m. the youth presented an interactive Stations of the Cross experience called "The Last Walk" and had a powerful and meaningful meditative Good Friday experience. Easter Sunday, they brought out all the bells and whistles, well, actually, the hand bells and brass! We celebrated the resurrection with classical, contemporary, and folk music. Hallelujah! Christ is risen indeed!

> **Brookmeade Congregational UCC | Nashville, TN**

Pastor Linda White - The church celebrated with an all UCC potluck and service. All pastors and lay folks from First United Church (Steve Cottingham), Holy Trinity Community Church (Cindy Andrews-Looper) and Howard Congregational Church (Christophe Ringer) gathered. This is a Nashville tradition and this year was hosted at Brookmeade.



> **Pilgrim Congregational Church UCC | Chattanooga, TN**

Pastor David Brown - On Sunday, March 27, 2011 participated in the 16th Annual Strides of March to benefit Chattanooga Cares. The event is to raise awareness and funds for HIV/AIDS in the Tennessee Valley. Our team was called "Pilgrims on a Mission" and we had 28 members participate in the event. We raised a total of \$1,126.91 for Chattanooga Cares. The walk is a 3.1 mile walk through downtown Chattanooga. (Pictured right: Strides of March team members).



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SEC Leadership Spotlight

Rev. Paul Gourdine



Originally from Charleston, South Carolina, **Rev. Paul Gourdine** inspires people, young and old, from all walks of life as he uses his God-given abilities to teach, motivate, and spiritually uplift. Professionally, Rev. Gourdine has made impressive strides in the computer science and technology realm. Graduating from Jarvis Christian College, Hawkins, TX with a degree in Business Administration and Computer Information Systems, and a M.Div. from Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, GA, Gourdine has worked at such esteemed organizations as Pricewaterhouse Cooper, the Georgia Department of Human Resources,

Georgia Department of Transportation, and the Department of Vital Records. He has served as an administrator and leader in all of his professional capacities.

Even more importantly than Gourdine's impressive professional portfolio is the essence of his higher-calling. Some of the same characteristics that catapulted Gourdine to success in the business world also enable him to reach people of all stripes as he administers the Word of God. Dependability, people skills, persuasive personal communication, compassion, family focus, and steadfast leadership are the qualities displayed by Gourdine as he embarks upon a mission to not only preach, but engage people in the lessons and importance of spiritual awakening. His reputation for his ability to encourage change is evident by his selection to pastor the Dexter Avenue United Methodist Church. He was the first African-American in American history to ever Pastor a predominately white church on the famed Dexter Avenue in downtown Montgomery AL. Currently Pastor Gourdine is the at-will Pastor of **Community Congregational United Church of Christ, Montgomery, AL**. Gourdine possesses the innate ability to transcend cultural differences and bring people together on common ground. Gourdine's ministry is one that focuses on the similarities that people have as Christians instead of minor differences that might set people apart.

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Georgia-South Carolina Association

A New Church Was Welcomed and Two Candidates for Ordination Were Approved



On April 16th, the Georgia-South Carolina Association gathered at Victory United Church of Christ, Stone Mountain, for its 2011 Annual Meeting under the leadership of its moderator Cornelius

Watts, a member of First Congregational UCC, Atlanta. Over 35 people were present representing Peace Congregational UCC, Clemson, Garden of Grace UCC, Columbia, Circular Congregational UCC, Charleston, and the following churches from Atlanta;



Central Congregational UCC, First Congregational UCC, Kirkwood UCC, Praxis UCC, Rush Memorial UCC, as well as Decatur UCC, Church of the Savior, Roswell, and Pilgrimage UCC, Marietta.

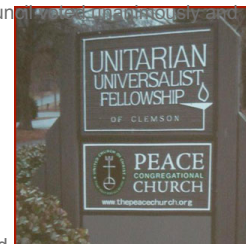
The first order of business was to call for an ecclesiastical council. The council received the presentation and petition of Peace Congregational UCC, in Clemson SC.

They introduced their ministries, and requested that they be received as a church in full standing in the UCC. With 53 charter members, Peace Congregational UCC has a ministry which has sought to "live gently on the land", and has modeled a radical hospitality. Serving a conservative community they are the only progressive Christian alternative in the region. Their pastor, Susie Smith has shown creative and energetic leadership and said as a part of the presentation; "it has been

an exciting three years that have felt like thirty!" The Council with joy to receive Peace Congregational UCC into full membership as a UCC congregation.



The ecclesiastical council then heard the two candidates for ordination, John and Rebecca Shillingburg. Both John and Rebecca are second career, and are about to graduate from Columbia Theological Seminary. They look forward to ministries set in rural or small town settings. John spoke first, preaching for the Jesus who scandalizes the affluent by calling them away from the illusion of self-sufficiency into community. Rebecca reflected on the parable of the mustard seed and the ways in which such a



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small seed can symbolize God's amazing power to disrupt and transform a life. She asked whether those gathered were ready for the mustard seeds in their lives an unexpected, invasive and reorienting in breaking of God. Both John and Rebecca were unanimously recommended for ordination. They are members of Church of the Savior in Roswell. Tim Downs took a moment to point out that Peace Congregational UCC and the Shillingburg's who came out of a newly affiliated congregation together represent the vitality that is sweeping the conference as a result of new churches and new leadership.



Following a brief business meeting, the meeting adjourned to lunch, where Dr. Kenneth L. Samuel, pastor and founder of Victory Church brought greetings. The Georgia South Carolina Committee on Ministry met over lunch, and during the meeting approved the transfer of ordained ministerial standing for Michael Piazza from the South Central Conference to the Southeast Conference. The also approved Jennifer Spears to be licensed for ministry at Garden of Grace UCC, in Columbia. Michael was the pastor of the Cathedral of Hope in Dallas prior to his call to serve Virginia Highland Church in Atlanta. Jennifer is about to graduate from the TAP program.



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Feature Focus - April 2011

Largest UCC History and Polity Class in Southeast Conference History Wraps Up!

On February 26th over twenty-five participants who had registered for the UCC History and Polity class taught by Tim Downs and Kathy Clark gathered in the conference room in the Conference building. On April 30th they gathered again for the last session of the class. Taught in partnership with the Center for Progressive Renewal and offered for credit through Candler School of Theology, this online class is another one of the ways that the Conference and its staff are committed to identifying and cultivating leadership for the future United Church of Christ.

This was the first time Tim has led an online class, and the second time that Kathy had participated in one, and marks a significant shift in the way that we will equip leaders for ministry. Through the TAP program we have brought lay leadership training in to every church in the Conference which has asked for it, and now in partnership with the Center for Progressive Renewal, we will be extending the ways we can teach and learn. This class for example attracted participants from North Carolina, New England and Ohio. One of the Center for Progressive Renewal staff working on technical support for the class remarked; "we are identifying strong leadership in this Conference many of whom will go into other settings of the United Church of Christ." The class was a mix of seminarians and clergy from other traditions, licensed ministers, and active lay leaders wishing to learn more about the United Church of Christ.

Given the strong response to this class the conference staff will be exploring offering the class in the fall as well as the spring as a part of the new Pathways program which will be launched in the fall. Tim Downs said, "Conducting this class for the first time on line, I have been impressed with the quality of the interaction among the participants, and the quality of the papers which they have produced. It is clear to me that online learning is not as impersonal and sterile as some think, rather it is a dynamic and highly engaging way to learn. I am a convert to online teaching!"

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Conference News - April



The **Theology Among the People (TAP)** program of the SEC received a grant from **The Richard and Helen Brown Foundation** of the UCC to help fund a clergy continuing education gathering and the development of **PATHWAYS**, the on-line successor to the TAP program which will be launched in Fall 2011. **Mark Your Calendar - Tap Graduation** will take place on **Saturday, August 27** in Atlanta. Details will be forthcoming. All former TAP graduates, current participants, facilitators, and family and friends of TAP are invited!

IMAGINE - *What is Possible!*

In the Southeast Conference-- Conference Reimagines our Annual Meeting! After years of a two day Annual Meeting featuring a Friday convocation, noteworthy keynoters and preachers, and dynamic worship, the Annual Meeting Planning Committee, led by Moderator Ginny Nixon is reimagining the Annual Meeting for 2011. The meeting will be a one day event on **Saturday, June 11th**, and hosted by **Central Congregational UCC, in Atlanta**. The thrust of the event will be to foster conversation among us, and invite feedback to the staff and leadership of the Conference concerning the direction and priorities of the Conference. [Link here to read all about the event and its new concept.](#)



Georgia-South Carolina
Association

"Calling All Clergy"

All **SEC** Clergy are invited to an informal, but important gathering to connect and converse. We will meet at the **Carpe Diem Bistro in Decatur | Friday, June 10 | 6:30 p.m.** Join other UCC pastors, chaplains and ministers for dinner and conversation on the Friday before this year's Southeast Conference Annual Meeting. There is a \$10 suggested donation. [Link here to read more about the event and for reservation form.](#)



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The association welcomed a new church and approves two candidates for ordination at its annual meeting. On April 16, the Georgia-South Carolina Association gathered at Victory United Church of Christ, Stone Mountain, for its 2011 Annual Meeting. [Link here to read more on the event and see those who attended.](#)



Mark Your Calendars!

Don't miss any of these upcoming events surrounding the **SEC Annual Meeting | Atlanta** and the **2011 General Synod | Tampa**.



- > **Social Media Boot Camp** | Friday, June 10
- > **Carpe Dinner** | Friday, June 10
- > **SEC Annual Meeting** | Saturday, June 11
- > **Fallen Is Babylon** | Friday, June 30
- > **General Synod** | Saturday, July 1

Don Clark, Moderator of the Alabama-Tennessee Association, is **Convener of the UCC Network for Environmental and Economic Responsibility** (NEER) and Economic Responsibility (NEER) and will be "voice without vote" at **General Synod 2011**. He and wife, Jean, will also be staffing the popular "buttons and bumper sticker" booth in the exhibit hall. They have been exhibiting at General Synods for over 40 years.

Look at What the **CPR** has Rolling out this May.

There is an array of online courses and webinars that will truly benefit your church ministries.



Church Renewal 101 | Rev. Michael Piazza | May 5 - June 9
Leadership in a New Church World | Anthony Robinson | May 17 - June 19
Developing a Stewardship Plan for Your Church | Coy James | May 26 - June 30

Register for a May Course and get all six **May Webinars** for free! (A \$100.00 Value!)

The Thailand 2011 Trip Participants

reunited at the scenic setting of Calvin Center, a retreat center located in Hampton, GA. Along with their three facilitators-Dr. Greg Carey, Rev. Kathy Clark, and Rev. Dr. Sarah Kim-the seven seminarian participants from Lancaster Theological Seminary and the seven participants from the Southeast Conference, UCC, spent the weekend engaging in critical theological reflection. [Link here to read more about this recent retreat](#) and the opportunity to process their learning experiences. [Link here for Thailand 2012 application.](#)

JOIN US on 2012
THAILAND TRIP



June 3
Application Deadline

Power Up your Church's Sunday Fellowship with Congo Coffee: Support SEC Missions!



The Fuller Center and the SEC share a common



Mission trip to Africa.

The Center and the SEC share a common vision and commitment to mission, witness, and justice for all of God's children. We are partnering in a mission trip to the Democratic Republic of Congo

A Congo mission trip is planned for August 2011. In the meantime, we have established a "Comma Grounds Mission Fundraiser" see details. We encourage your church to order and serve this Fair Trade Coffee and help support the SEC

Check out the Cafe and Power Up your Sunday Fellowship!

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The Comma Grounds Mission Fundraiser

The Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ - Will be sending a missions delegation to Africa to visit one of the important *“Hidden Histories”* of the UCC. [Follow the link to read more on the UCC's role in the birth of the modern affordable housing movement.](#)

To help support this trip, we are selling Fair Trade Organic Coffee - both regular and decaf!

Congregations can gather orders and coffee will be shipped directly to your church. The online shopping cart will give your church the opportunity to make additional donations to support this trip. [Click here to download a form](#) to collect coffee orders from your church members.



> **UCC- Fair Trade Organic Coffee Blend**, Regular Ground / \$11.00 per pound *Minimum 20 pounds per order + Flat Rate \$15 Shipping/Handling. The lemon flavor of Yirgacheffe combined with the dark chocolate essence of East Timor makes for a smooth, medium-bodied cup with a bright but balanced acidity. A touch of Guatemala adds a hint of spice. Coffee producer partners: Oromia (OCFCU) (Ethiopia), Cafe Timor (East Timor), APECAFORM (Guatemala)

> **UCC-Fair Trade Organic Decaf**, Ground / \$11.00 per pound *Minimum 20 pounds per order + Flat Rate \$15 Shipping/Handling
Nice floral fragrance and sweet aroma. Medium bodied with soft acidity. Sweet flavor and nice fruity aftertaste. For decaf lovers as well as those who thought decaf couldn't taste this good! Natural water process decaffeinated coffee from either of three producer partners: Maya Vinic (Mexico), Redcafes (Mexico) or CAC Pangoa (Peru).

[Learn more about our coffee supplier.](#)

[Georgia Public Television review of Cafe Campesino and Cooperative Coffees](#)

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Save the Date

Calling All Clergy: Carpe Dinner! Clergy Gathering on June 10

All SEC Clergy are invited to an informal, but important gathering to connect and converse. Please plan to join us and other UCC pastors, chaplains and ministers for dinner and conversation at 6:30 PM on Friday, June 10 - the evening before this year's SEC Annual Meeting.

Carpe Diem Bistro

Decatur, GA
105 Sycamore Place, Decatur, GA
30030

[Link here for more information on the restaurant.](#)

[Link here for dinner
RESERVATION form.](#)



We are all familiar with the Latin mandate, Carpe Diem, to seize the day. For clergy whose lives are often filled to the brim with competing demands and opportunities for ministry, study, worship preparation, pastoral visits, capital campaigns, committee meetings, etc., etc., etc., it is often hard to find time to seize a moment, much less a whole day. That is precisely why it is so important to make the opportunity, to engage in self-care and to provide mutual support to one another in this call that we share. Toward that end, your fellow clergy would like to invite you to take some special time away on the evening before this year's Southeast Conference Annual Meeting to join with one another and **"Seize the Dinner."**

All clergy of the Southeast Conference - licensed, commissioned, and ordained, in parish and specialized ministries - and their partners and spouses, are invited to a special clergy gathering on the evening preceeding the **SEC Annual Meeting**. A cash bar happy hour will begin at 6:30 p.m. and dinner will be served at 7:30 p.m.

Reservations are required and a \$10 donation per person is requested to help offset the costs of a lovely dinner and evening together. (*Consider it a cheap date with your fellow ministers!*) The major costs of this event are being underwritten by a special

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grant from the Brown Foundation which is strongly committed to clergy continuing education.

If you are a clergy member, please consider joining us for an evening of conversation and fellowship with one another. If you are a lay person, please encourage your clergy to participate in this event. Together we will imagine ways to connect and support one another by building collegiality and nurturing a culture of continuing education for ministry. But first, we'll start with a wonderful dinner and time to get to know one another better.

Don't miss this chance to share good food, warm fellowship and your ideas about the kind of support that would be helpful to you in your life and work. Spouses, partners and significant others are welcome as well. For more information, please contact [Susannah Davis](#)[Susannah Davis](#) , [John Gill](#)[John Gill](#) , or [Kathy Clark](#)[Kathy Clark](#) . Space is limited to 40 people, so please make your reservations early by contacting [Kathy Clark](#)[Kathy Clark](#) , *Associate Conference Minister for Ministry Formation and Leadership Development*.

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"Carpe Dinner"

SEC Clergy Gathering
Reservation Form

Friday, June 10th | Beginning at 6:30 p.m.

Carpe Diem Bistro

105 Sycamore Place
Decatur, GA 30030

Please reserve a place for the following people *(make as many copies as needed)*.
A \$10 donation per person is requested.

Name: _____

Clergy: _____

Partner or Spouse: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City / State / Zip: _____

Email address: _____

Phone numbers: (w): _____

(h): _____

(m): _____

Special dietary needs: _____

Please make \$10 checks payable to Southeast
Conference UCC *(put "Clergy Gathering" in the memo line)*

Mail check to:

Kathy Clark

Southeast Conference UCC

1330 W. Peachtree Street, NW, Suite 350

Atlanta, GA 30309

Or email Kathy at: kclark@secucc.org



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Celebrations April 2011



> On April 3rd, **Safe Harbor Family Church** in Jackson Mississippi celebrated its affiliation with the United Church of Christ following a period of discernment. A rapidly growing congregation under the leadership of co-pastors Andre Vlok and Pam Walsh., Safe Harbor had not been affiliated with a denomination at any point



in its thirteen year history. The church has a member attending Lancaster Seminary and looks forward to engaging the United Church of Christ and the Southeast Conference as it seeks to deepen and broaden its ministries. Tim Downs preached for the occasion, and Barbara Everett was present to represent the association in a service of

reception of a local church into the United Church of Christ. (Pictured left: Barbara Everett and Tim Downs at Safe Harbor Family Church).



> Tim and Barbara attended worship at **Union Chapel on Tougaloo College campus**, where Tim preached. Following the worship service there was gathering for food and conversation. (Pictured right: Union Chapel on Tougaloo College Campus; Tim Downs and Tougaloo President Beverly Hogan with Chaplain Larry Johnson).



> On April 8, 2011, **Local Church Ministries** awarded support to new SEC church starts, **Open Table: A Community of Faith**, Mobile, AL (Ellen Sims) and **Praxis UCC**, Atlanta, GA (Chris Waldron). [Link here to read full article.](#)

> **The Theology Among the People (TAP) program** of the SEC received a grant from The Richard and Helen Brown Foundation of the UCC to help fund a clergy continuing education gathering and the development of Pathways, the on-line successor to the TAP program which will be launched in Fall 2011.



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Upcoming Celebrations in May - please attend and show support for neighboring congregations.



> **Peace Congregational UCC** will celebrate being received as a congregation in full standing in the UCC May 8th, at 5:00 p.m. Here is [recent press release from Peace](#).
Everyone is invited to worship on May 8th.
[Link here to read letter of invitation.](#)

> **David Sigmund** will be ordained in a service of ordination at Kirkwood UCC on May 15th, at 5:00 p.m.

> **First Congregational UCC, Talladega, AL**, will celebrate its 143rd church anniversary and homecoming on Sunday, May 15, 2011, at the 11 a.m. worship service. Following the worship service, the church will unveil and dedicate an Alabama Historical Landmark marker. The church will be listed in the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage. The Rev. Arthur Price, Jr., pastor of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, Al, will be the guest speaker. Associate Conference Minister Kathy Clark will bring greetings from the conference.

> Friday, May 20, promises to be a great day in the life of **Pleasant Hill Community Church, Pleasant Hill, TN**. In St. Louis that day pastor, Tom Warren will receive an honorary D.D. degree and Debbie Douglas will graduate from Eden Seminary with a M.Div. degree.

> **Michael Piazza** will be installed as pastor of Virginia Highland Church on May 22nd at 3:00 p.m.

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SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST “*TRANSFORMING CHURCHES - TRANSFORMING LIVES*” **C A M P A I G N U P D A T E**

March, 2011

We are blessed and thankful for all the pledges of financial support that have been given to the Capital Campaign. Since last month, however, there have been no new church pledges.

Our Campaign Total is \$486,365.

Comments:

- There are still a handful of churches who intend to participate but who are awaiting a congregational vote.
- Remember that a **successful Capital Campaign** will allow the Conference to provide much needed programs and ministries not currently possible through our denominational giving (OCWM).
- Resources are available from the Conference Campaign office to facilitate church discussions around conducting a campaign at the local church level.
- Be sure to check out additional news, pictures and information about the campaign at www.secucc.org/church-growth/conference-campaign

| |
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| <p>If you have any questions or comments about the Campaign, please call or email Debbie Spearman, Campaign Follow-up Director, at (800) 903-1535 or at campaign@secucc.org.</p> |
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Monday, 16 May 2011

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The SEC and UCC Respond as Hundreds of Homes are Destroyed in Waves of Severe Weather

This is an Alert on How You May Assist in This Time of Need

Devastating storms Wednesday spawned deadly tornadoes that moved across Mississippi, Georgia and Alabama. The purpose of this email is to alert you to the ways in which you and your congregation may respond to this catastrophe and to let you know how the **Southeast Conference** is responding. Currently, UCC churches across the Southeast Conference are providing immediate relief in their communities to those in need of food and water.

Southeast Conference FAQ's

[Who is the SEC?](#)

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AFP/Getty Images - Jessica McGowan

The **United Church of Christ's Disaster Ministries** anticipates participating in an ecumenical effort to assist people to repair and rebuild homes.

Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal declared four northwestern counties disaster areas after storms and tornadoes blew through the area. Governors of Mississippi and Alabama

of Mississippi and Alabama

also declared disaster areas, emergency management officials said.

In Alabama, the National Guard dispatched hundreds of personnel to some of the state's hardest hit areas. President Barack Obama announced late Wednesday he approved Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley's request for emergency federal assistance, including search and rescue support.

"While we may not know the extent of the damage for days, we will continue to monitor these severe storms across the country and stand ready to continue to help the people across the southeast and all citizens affected by these storms," Obama said in a statement. Most of the 154 tornado sightings reported to the Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Oklahoma, were from Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, and Tennessee, AccuWeather.com reported.

From Tim Downs - Here is What is Currently Happening:

1. The **United Church of Christ** has launched an emergency appeal to the entire church, and it is posted on www.ucc.org.

2. I have appointed [Angie Wright](#) and **LeNard Brown** to be our coordinators in response to this disaster, and I am working with our colleague in the national offices to get them the credentials they need to have access to the sites of damage.

3. Gifts are Being Given via Congregations in "Special Offerings."

If you wish to send contributions through the [Southeast Conference](#) we will also accept checks made out to "Southeast Conference UCC", and note in the memo "**OGHS Alabama Tornado Relief.**" You may donate online at the SEC by clicking button to the right.

4. Through **One Great Hour of Sharing** the SEC has already requested a \$2000 grant in aid to each of our churches which have members that have incurred losses in the tornadoes.

5. Online Donations are Being Made.

Make a secure online donation to the [OGHS International Disaster Relief Fund](#). Mark the gift being made for "**OGHS Tornado Relief.**"



OGHS Alabama Tornado Relief

6. Clean Up and Hygiene Kits are Being Donated.

Support of this program helps to ensure kits are available for immediate response after a disaster in another part of the world and here in the United States. For more information on kits follow link to [Church World Service](#) organization.

Our SECUCC Members:

A number of you have asked what impact the tornadoes have had on our churches and their membership. This is what I know:

- > Two families in Beloved Community UCC, Birmingham have lost their homes.
- > Two families of Trinity Congregational UCC, Athens, AL have had significant damage, one family lost their home and car, and another lost the roof on their house.
- > One member of United Church Huntsville had a tree go through her roof. The church is mobilizing to help secure her house and prevent further damage.
- > Two families of Church of the Savior UCC, Knoxville sustained damage to homes.

Please Pray for people who live in communities affected by tornadoes. Feel free to be in touch with me for any further information or details.

Thank you for your compassion and support.

[Timothy C. Downs.](#)
Conference Minister

Southeast Conference UCC
1330 West Peachtree Street, Suite 350
Atlanta, GA 30309
(404) 607-1993 Ext. 1
www.secucc.org

Latest News

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FAVORITE LINKS

- Bridge 4 Faith
- The Center for Progressive Renewal
- United Church of Christ
- Mission Insite
- Resource Center

EVENTS CALENDAR

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| 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 |
| 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 |
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IMAGINE - *What is Possible!*

In the Southeast Conference-- Conference Reimagines our Annual Meeting!

After years of a two day Annual Meeting featuring a Friday convocation, noteworthy keynoters and preachers, and dynamic worship, the Annual Meeting Planning Committee, led by Moderator Ginny Nixon is reimagining the Annual Meeting for 2011. The meeting will be a one day event on **Saturday, June 11th, and hosted by Central Congregational UCC, in Atlanta.**

The thrust of the event will be to foster conversation among us, and invite feedback to the staff and leadership of the Conference concerning the direction and priorities of the Conference. By holding it for one day, we are seeking to make this an accessible and affordable experience for all members of our churches. The registration fee will be \$25, including lunch and refreshments throughout the day. The meeting will begin with an orientation and then worship at 11:00 Saturday morning. However, from 9:15 until 10:45 there will be conversation corners available for people to speak with staff and others about matters of importance to them. We will have people available to have conversations on Pathways, the new program that will succeed the TAP program, the Campaign to Transform the conference, the work and resources of the Center for Progressive Renewal, the Conference finances, disaster relief in the Southeast, the upcoming conference trip to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and more.



UCC News

UCC Newsroom

Headlines from the United Church of Christ

[WCM executive calls for 'complete withdrawal' of Ugandan anti-gay legislation](#)

The Rev. Cally Rogers-Witte, the UCC's executive minister for Wider Church Ministries, issued a statement today (May 11) calling for the Ugandan government to drop legislation that calls for the imprisonment of homosexuals.



4:00. How will this be? We hope you will plan to be with us both to share and to speak. The organizing committee has said "it is time for us to take a deep breath, and listen to one another in new ways. We hope to build a stronger sense of community and belonging among us through this new format. And, oh yes! We would like everyone to be at General Synod in Tampa July 1-5!"

[Link here for additional Annual Meeting information.](#)

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